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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides current information about the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading. In addition to describing the purpose and goals of the NAEP, the pamphlet discusses the reasons for assessing reading, the 1992 NAEP in Reading (including recent changes), the guidelines used to create a framework for reading assessment, what the 1992 NAEP in Reading will examine, and how the results will be used. In addition, the pamphlet describes special studies to be conducted as part of the 1992 Reading Assessment. Distinctive features of the 1992 Reading Assessment are also listed. (PRA)

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Looking at How Well Our Students Read

The 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Why We Assess Reading

Today, reading is more important to us, and especially to children, than ever before:

- Reading is essential for acquiring the new knowledge and skills needed for productive participation in a global workplace.
- As the need for strong political and civic institutions intensifies, so does the need for an informed and literate citizenry.
- Using reading to understand our options, make choices, and apply well-reasoned values is increasingly important in our society and culture.
- New developments in our society demand more, not less, reading ability if we are to use them wisely and well.

For these and a thousand other reasons, ensuring that students learn to read well is fundamental to building the future. We can know if we are doing the job right only if we measure our progress—rigorously, often, and well. That is what the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading is all about.

What Is NAEP?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress—the "Nation's Report Card"—is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969–70, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, and other fields. By making objective information on student performance available to policymakers, educators, and the general public, NAEP is an integral part of our Nation's evaluation of the condition and progress of education.

NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible, by law, for carrying out the NAEP project through competitive awards to qualified organizations.

In 1988, Congress created the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). This 23-member board is composed of persons from the general public, classroom teachers, curriculum and measurement specialists, state and local superintendents, state legislators, and governors. NAGB is responsible for selecting the subject areas to be assessed, identifying appropriate achievement goals for each age and grade, developing assessment objectives and test specifications, developing guidelines for analysis, reporting and disseminating results, and improving the form and use of the assessment. NAGB is also responsible for ensuring that all items selected for use in NAEP are free from racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias.

The 1992 NAEP in Reading

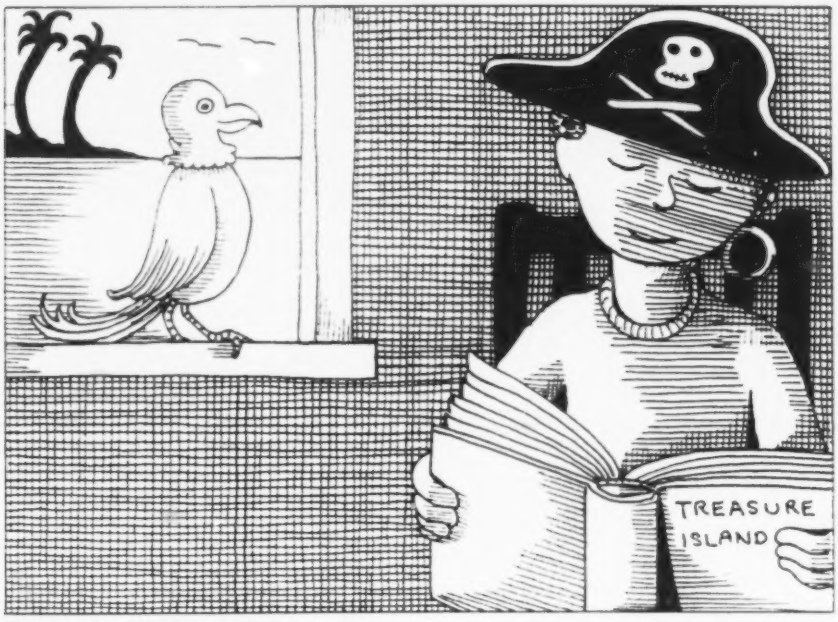
Currently, multiple-choice tests are the method used for much educational assessment. Although such tests provide some useful information, they cannot capture the full range of student abilities. NAGB believes the quality of information about how well children are learning must be improved. As a society, we need to find out not only *what* children know, but how well they can *apply* their knowledge to realistic and challenging educational tasks.

Recent Changes in NAEP

In recent years, NAEP has developed assessment procedures that rely more heavily on open-ended questions. These questions examine not just whether students know specific information, but how readily they can think for themselves, reflect on and evaluate their understandings, explain what they know (orally and in writing), and apply their knowledge in different situations.

Another recent change in NAEP is the gathering of information to report to individual

states. Since 1984, most state education leaders have asked for this information. They wanted to know how well their states were doing in education compared to other states and to the Nation as a whole. They also wanted to get a better sense of state-level instructional programs that needed improvement. In 1987, a national study group recommended to the Secretary of Education that NAEP collect representative data on student achievement at the state level. In 1990, the NAEP eighth-grade mathematics assessment provided these comparisons for the first time in 37 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia. In 1992, the same will be done for reading—in a trial state-by-state assessment at the fourth grade. Also, the 1992 trial assessment in math will be expanded to include grade four, as well as grade eight.



Reading for literary experience

NAEP Results Are Used to

- **Inform** the general public and policymakers about what American students know and understand;
- **Report** on trends in reading achievement over time;
- **Inform** general curriculum decision making at local and state levels;
- **Highlight** patterns and changes in instruction in various subject areas;
- **Improve** assessment techniques; and
- **Improve** reading and learning in other subject areas nationwide.

Guidelines: Creating a Framework for the Reading Assessment

Reading is a complex process, and scholars have defined an extensive array of intellectual skills involved in learning how to comprehend what is read. In 1989–90, NAGB began to prepare for the 1992 Reading Assessment by establishing the Reading Consensus Project. This group began to construct an assessment framework that would recognize the complexity of reading while focusing on particular core aspects to measure.

The Project's Steering Committee, representing educators and the public, developed six guidelines for the assessment. These guidelines called for a reading assessment that would

- **Focus on results**, rather than on specific methods for teaching reading;
- **Be real-world oriented**, by addressing the Nation's changing literacy needs for employability, personal development, and effective citizenship;
- **Be innovative**, by supporting the expansion of existing assessment strategies to include more open-ended questions, non-traditional approaches, and new formats;
- **Respond to the latest scholarship** on reading theory and instruction;
- **Create information for policymakers** that can help support informed decisions; and

- **Provide a forum for discussing what is reasonable** for students to know and be able to do.

The Project's Planning Committee, composed of a number of nationally known reading authorities and teachers, used these guidelines as the basis for the new NAEP Reading Assessment.

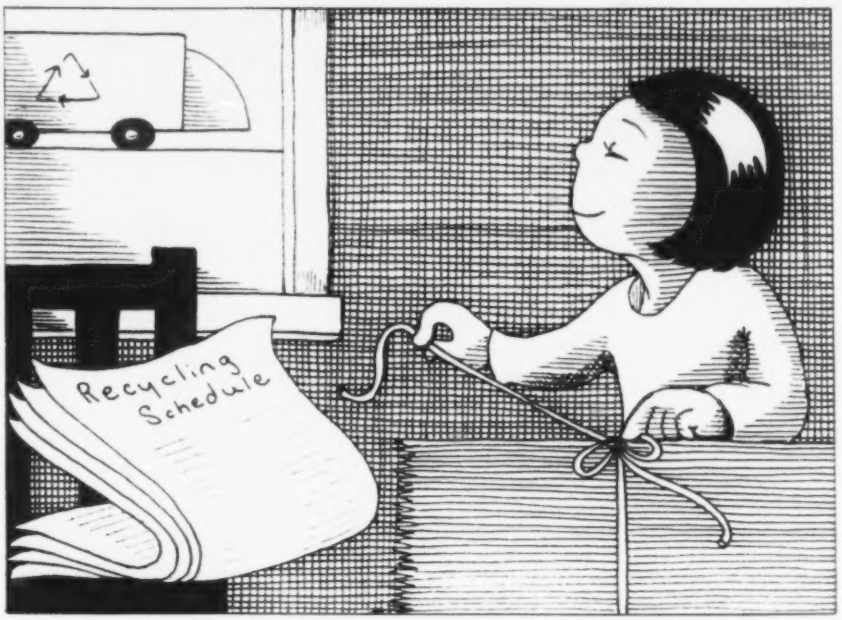
Other Considerations

In addition to the considerations set forth in the guidelines, other considerations help clarify what the assessment is, as well as what it is not.

First, the assessment focuses on how well readers can read in a variety of situations. Put differently, the assessment takes into account that reading is not a simple, one-dimensional skill that can be summed up in a single score, like a child's temperature. Thus, the assessment is not concerned with "functional literacy" or "minimal skills," as important as they may be.

Second, while the information gathered can be of great value in improving instruction, the Reading Assessment—by itself—is not intended to drive instruction. This assessment will be broad enough to reflect contemporary concepts of reading without impinging on the decision-making functions of local and state policymakers.

Third, the Reading Assessment should be viewed as a way to improve our ability to assess. A well-designed, innovative assessment expands the boundaries of current evaluation methods.



Reading to get information

What the 1992 Assessment Will Examine

Begin with the obvious: The purpose of reading education is to help students become good readers. But what is a *good* reader? From research and practice we know that a good reader

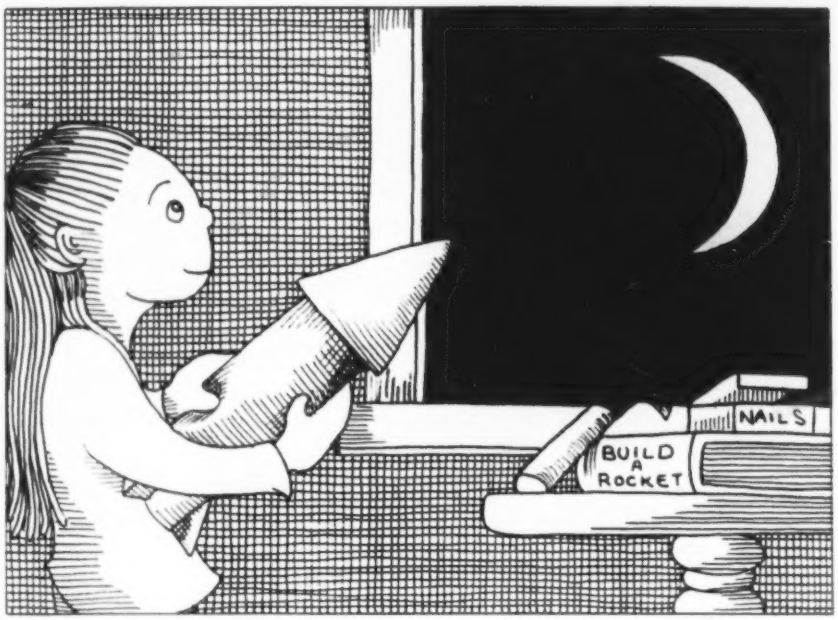
- Reads well enough to pay attention to the meaning of a passage rather than having to figure out individual words;
- Is able to comprehend, analyze, and critically examine different kinds of texts (for example, a novel, an article, a short story, a textbook, or a poem);
- Uses a variety of strategies (such as predicting, skimming, and re-reading) to plan, manage, and check on understanding; and
- Enjoys reading and reads for a variety of purposes.

The 1992 NAEP in Reading will assess all of these characteristics as well as several others.

Types of Reading Situations

The 1992 NAEP Reading Framework points out that reading is not a simple event but, rather, a complex interactive process that brings together a reader, a written text, and the situation or context that surrounds them. Readers use different strategies and approaches to their reading, depending on the kind of text and their purposes for reading.

As readers' purposes change, so do their approaches—even to the same material. For example, each of us would read a poem differently, depending on whether we wanted to enjoy it, study the author's use of imagery, or memorize it. People usually read novels for the literary experience, newspapers for information, and instruction manuals to accomplish tasks. Therefore, the 1992 assessment



Reading to perform a task

will examine performance in three basic reading situations:

- Reading for **literary experience**;
- Reading to get **information**; and
- Reading to **perform a task**.

Specific Reading Abilities

Within each of these reading situations, certain reading abilities will be measured. These are:

- Forming an initial understanding;
- Developing an interpretation;
- Personal reflection and response; and
- Developing a critical stance.

Readers of all ages should have these abilities, although they are not necessarily acquired in a sequence or hierarchy, and readers will not possess them in the same degree. Each reading ability is described below.

Forming an initial understanding involves constructing an initial, global understanding of the ideas in a text. To evaluate initial understanding, the assessment asks open-ended questions such as, "What is this passage mainly about?" or "How would you summarize this passage?" Usually, the first question asks about the reader's initial understanding of the text. Followup questions deal with more developed understandings.

Developing an interpretation requires the reader to go beyond initial understanding of the text. Assessment questions that tap this aspect of reading might include: "How does this character change from the beginning to the end of the story?" or "What caused the character to feel happy?"

Personal reflection and response requires readers to connect information from the text with their own knowledge. Questions that ask readers to relate the ideas in a passage to their own knowledge or point of view require personal reflection; for example, "Explain how this story is different from your own experience."

Developing a critical stance requires readers to stand apart from the text and consider it objectively. Questions of this type might include: "What could be added to improve the author's argument?"

Special Dimensions

As part of the 1992 Reading Assessment, NAEP will conduct the following special studies:

1. **Integrated Reading Performance Record**

   A sample of some 2,000 fourth graders will be asked to read passages aloud and respond orally to questions about them. This aspect of the study focuses on finding out how important fluency is for readers. Because both the oral and written parts of the assessment will include the same questions, responses can be compared for similarities and differences. Thus, the oral assessment—with its emphasis on verbal response—will illuminate how the writing requirements of the longer, open-ended questions impede or promote the accurate assessment of students' reading.

Distinctive Features of the 1992 Reading Assessment

- **An expanded understanding of reading**— The 1992 NAEP in Reading builds on recent studies and views reading as a constructive, dynamic process, rather than just a collection of unrelated subskills. It acknowledges that a reader's way of reading changes in response to the purposes for reading and the type of material being read.
- **A variety of passages**—The assessment will use longer, naturally occurring stories and articles, as well as documents. A part of the assessment will allow students to choose one story from a booklet of short stories and to answer questions about it. Some tasks will require students to make connections across several passages.
- **A new system for developing questions**—Instead of asking only questions that require students to pick out information in a text, the assessment will include questions that focus on the reader's response to the passage and the reading situation.
- **Different kinds of questions**—The assessment uses many open-ended questions, some requiring extended writing and others, short answers. New multiple-choice questions will emphasize critical thinking rather than factual recall.
- **Reporting methods**—Three sets of scores instead of one will be used to examine proficiency in reading for literary experience, reading to be informed, and reading to perform a task.

2. Reading Portfolio Components.

This aspect of the study focuses on finding out how the assessment can better measure performance in the "real world". Many teachers now collect folders of students' classwork, tests, interviews, and special projects as a tool for evaluating their progress. By examining a sample of student reading activities, NAEP will document reading performance in day-to-day classroom work and student responses to longer texts, such as novels. Interviews with students will supplement the assessment of the portfolio samples. Portfolio components can become an important part of the NAEP assessments because they open a window on the classroom, involve teachers directly, and provide parents and the public with a picture of what students actually do in school.

Several other unique dimensions in reading will be explored:

- **Developing Positive Reading Habits and Practices**

  Good readers like to think of themselves as good readers. They read a variety of materials, read often, and have their own ideas about what makes reading enjoyable or useful. In 1992, NAEP will report on such reading habits and practices. This information could be used to guide decisions about ways to encourage students to read more often.

- **Using Effective Strategies and Knowledge About Reading**

  Good readers understand how to check their success in reading. They ask themselves questions such as, "What do I already know about this topic?" or "What should I look for in this passage?" A related research project will be conducted outside of the NAEP assessment to provide information on students' use of reading strategies. ■

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